SWLA Regional Planning Commission

Louisiana Planning District 5

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
MEETING
Wednesday, December 17, 2025, Noon
2nd Floor, East Conference Room
HENNING SEED CENTER,
4310 Ryan Street, Lake Charles, LA 70605
ZOOM: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9583967845

MINUTES

I. Call to Order

Mr. Jacob Dillehay
Chair

II. Roll Call

Mr. Mike Hollier
Director

Mr. Jacob Dillehay – Responded Present
Mayor Hal McMillin – Responded Present
Ms. Mary Kaye Eason – Responded Present
Mr. Ben Boudreaux – Responded Present
Ms. Lisa Adams – Responded Present
Ms. Katie Armentor – No Response
Mayor Mike Danahay – Responded Present
Mayor Michael Harris – No Response
Ms. Kim Montie – Responded Present
Ms. Carter Prejean – Responded Present
Mayor Marshall Simien – No Response
Mayor David Vidrine – No Response
Mayor Neal Watkins – Responded Present

III. Reading and Adoption of Minutes

Ms. Mary Kaye Eason
Secretary

A. Draft Minutes of Meeting held on November 20, 2025
Action requested.

A MOTION to dispense reading of the November 20, 2025 meeting minutes was made by Mayor Mike Danahay and seconded by Mayor Hal McMillin. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

A MOTION to accept the November 20, 2025 meeting minutes was made by Mayor Hal McMillin and seconded by Mayor Mike Danahay. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

IV. Financial Reports

Mr. Ben Boudreaux
Treasurer

A. November 2025 Financial Report

Action requested.

Mr. Ben Boudreaux reviewed the monthly financial report and stated that total income for the month was $151,238 and total expenses were $137,961, resulting in a net income of $13,276. He noted that the general ledger report was included and thanked staff for providing and reviewing the report. He stated that Board members who wish to review the information in more detail have a copy in their meeting folders. He concluded that he had no further comments.

A MOTION to approve the November 2025 Financial Report was made by Mayor Hal McMillin and seconded by Mayor Mike Danahay. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

B. Presentation of SWLA-RPC 2024-2025 Draft Single Audit Report By McElroy, Quirk & Burch

Mr. Jason Guillory

Receipt Acknowledgement. Action requested.

Mr. Jason Guillory thanked the Board for the opportunity to present and introduced himself as the audit partner with McElroy, Kirk, and Birch. He stated that the firm is presenting the June 30 financial report. He noted that the financial statements were previously emailed in PDF format, and because he was unsure who had access to them, he prepared a one-page executive summary to provide a high-level overview of the financials. He stated that he would keep his remarks brief and welcomed any questions from the Board.

Mr. Guillory summarized the balance sheet from page 11 of the financial report by major asset and liability categories. He stated that cash increased by $137,536. He noted that grants receivable were comparable to the prior year at $196,623, compared to $205,973, and stated that details of the grants comprising that balance as of June 30, 2025, can be found on page 24 of the notes to the financial statements. He stated that other assets increased by $27,847, primarily due to $25,000 receivable related to the LUS Fiber Project for the City of Jennings. He stated that total assets increased from $709,918 to $865,951, an increase of approximately $156,000.

He reported that on the liability side, balances were very similar to the prior year. He explained that deferred inflows recorded in the prior year were related to prepaid dues and did not occur in the current year. He stated that liabilities were minimal, resulting in a net position of $823,923, which he described as comparable to retained earnings in a business context. He stated that this represents an increase of $166,462, which is the net income for the year.

He reported that the budgetary revenue and expenditure schedule was summarized on page 31 of the report, which provides additional detail regarding expenses. Federal, state, and grant revenues decreased from $1,360,042 to $1,093,704, which was the most significant factor impacting the financial statements for the year. He explained that the decrease in grant revenue resulted in a corresponding decrease in expenditure, particularly in personnel, which decreased by $184,565. The primary grant decrease was the Metropolitan Transportation Plan grant, which declined by approximately $320,000 from the prior year. Increases in other grants partially offset that decrease, but overall grant revenue declined by approximately $266,000. Some of the reductions were offset by increased dues revenue and other income.

Mr. Guillory stated that other income consisted primarily of the Chennault/SOWELA Transportation Study and the Jennings LUS Fiber Project. Overall net income for the year was $166,462, which was nearly identical to the prior year's $166,848. Despite the significant decrease in grant revenue, expenditure decreased accordingly, resulting in a similar net financial outcome.

He noted that the audited financial information reflects June 30 balances and therefore has limited applicability for decision-making as of the current date but emphasized that these are the official audited numbers.

On page 44 of the report, MQB issued a summary of audit results. He explained that the purpose of the audit is to express an opinion on whether the financial statements are fairly presented in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. He stated that the firm issued an unmodified opinion, also known as a clean opinion, indicating that the financial statements are fairly stated.

During the audit of a governmental entity, MQB also evaluates internal controls and compliance with laws and regulations. He stated that there was one finding related to internal controls over financial reporting, specifically that the RPC drafts the financial statements based on the entity's accounting records. He stated that this is very common among small entities due to the complexity of accounting standards and noted this as a repeat finding.

One prior finding related to segregation of duties was resolved this year. He stated that the Board raised this issue previously and that the firm worked with Ms. Jamie Gaines and Ms. Brittany Shirley to reevaluate internal controls and implement adjustments. He stated that sufficient checks and balances are now in place, and the segregation of duties issue was removed as a finding.

He stated that Mr. Mike Hollier and Ms. Gaines are highly involved in transaction approvals and explained that while controls are in place, documentation of approvals is sometimes difficult to identify during audit testing because transactions may have occurred many months earlier. He stated that lack of initials on certain documents does not indicate absence of controls but rather lack of visible evidence.

All Louisiana governmental entities are also subject to agreed-upon procedures. Minor exceptions were identified, primarily related to missing initials on reviewed documents. He stated that these exceptions were discussed with Ms.

Jamie Gaines, Mr. Mike Hollier, and Ms. Brittany Shirley, and emphasis was placed on the importance of documenting reviews going forward. These exceptions are not findings and do not rise to the same level of concern, which is why they are not included in the summary.

Because the RPC expended more than $750,000 in federal awards, it was subject to a Single Audit. MQB issued an unmodified opinion on compliance for the federal programs tested and reported no internal control findings related to those programs.

He concluded by recognizing Ms. Kennedy Darbone, stating that she performed much of the audit work. He thanked Ms. Gaines and Mr. Hollier for their cooperation and assistance throughout the audit and invited any questions from the Board.

Mr. Hollier thanked Mr. Guillory and stated that he appreciates the firm keeping the organization on the right track. He stated that it is very important to him that the work is done as accurately and effectively as possible.

Mr. Jacob Dillehay opened the floor to the Board and asked whether there were any questions for the auditor. He also thanked Ms. Gaines for working with the auditor to address the items identified by the Board last year and for resolving the related finding. He extended his appreciation to the staff for their efforts in completing that work.

A MOTION to acknowledge receipt of the SWLA-RPC 2024-2025 Draft Single Audit Report was made by Mayor Hal McMillin and seconded by Ms. Mary Kaye Eason. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

V. **Resolution No. 2326 Approving and Authorizing the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission to apply for the Foundation for Louisiana – Louisiana Justice Fund: Reentry & Economic Mobility (ReEM) Grant.** Ms. Jamie Gaines

Action requested.

A MOTION to discuss Resolution No. 2326 Approving and Authorizing the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission to apply for the Foundation for Louisiana – Louisiana Justice Fund: Reentry & Economic Mobility (ReEM) Grant was made by Mayor Hal McMillan and seconded by Mr. Ben Boudreaux. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried, and the floor opened for discussion.

Ms. Jamie Gaines stated that several months ago the organization received a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture called the Broadband Technical Assistance Grant for a total award of $350,000. She stated that part of the objective of the grant is to identify funding opportunities for additional broadband expansion. She noted that broadband was identified as one of the district's initiatives in the 2021 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies, and that it continues to be at the forefront.

Staff has had the opportunity to work with SOWELA to provide technical assistance related to fiber technician certifications within the community. During the research phase, an additional grant opportunity through the Foundation for Louisiana was identified that focuses on individuals who are incarcerated and preparing to reenter the community. If funded, the grant would fund fiber technician certification training at the Phelps/Allen Parish Correctional Facility.

Ms. Gaines requested authorization to complete and submit the grant application.

A MOTION to approve Resolution No. 2326 Approving and Authorizing the Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission to apply for the Foundation for Louisiana – Louisiana Justice Fund: Reentry & Economic Mobility (ReEM) Grant was made by Mayor Hal McMillan and seconded by Mayor Neal Watkins. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

VI. Resolution No. 2327 Approving and Authorizing Proposed Legislation to Establish the West Louisiana Public Coordination District for Louisiana Watershed Initiative Region 4 Mr. Mike Hollier

Action requested.

A MOTION to discuss Resolution No. 2327 Approving and Authorizing Proposed Legislation to Establish the West Louisiana Public Coordination District for Louisiana Watershed Initiative Region 4 was made by Mayor Hal McMillan and seconded by Ms. Mary Kaye Eason. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried, and the floor opened for discussion.

Mr. Mike Hollier provided a brief background on the Louisiana Watershed Districts. He stated that there are nine districts in Louisiana. He noted that Region 9 and Region 5 have adopted legislature creating permanent operating districts to serve their regions, and that Region 6, the Houma region, is currently working with its legislative delegation to create a similar entity. Region 4 has not yet taken that step.

The Watershed Steering Committee recommended early on, before the SWLA-RPC assumed responsibility, that the Region not rely solely on grants and should instead have its own revenue source. He believes the timing is appropriate to pursue adoption during the upcoming legislative session scheduled to begin in February 2026.

A last-minute amendment was made to the Acadiana Region 5 legislation approximately a year and a half ago requiring any tax proposal by the district to be approved by all participating parishes, and that Region 5 plans to return to the legislature to have that requirement removed. Mr. Hollier is meeting with representatives from the Houma region to discuss the status of their legislation. He expressed the opinion that if Region 4 mirrors the approach taken by other districts already approved by the legislature, our proposal should not encounter significant issues.

Mr. Hollier stated that the bylaws adopted by the Region 4 Coalition Policy Council must be reviewed to ensure consistency with the proposed legislation, including confirming that all provisions align with what has already been approved by the

Council. He stated that aside from that review, he believes the organization is prepared to move forward. He explained that the draft resolution is largely based on language from the districts previously approved by the legislature, with modifications limited to alignment with the current bylaws, subject to Coalition Policy Council approval. He stated that he views the proposal as straightforward, while acknowledging that others may hold differing opinions.

He reported that the organization is currently under contract, with an extension through the end of December 2026, to complete a comprehensive watershed plan for the Region 4 nine-parish area. One of the critical recommendations in the plan is the creation of approximately 15 reservoirs, described as a series of retention facilities and various detailed components extending from Shreveport to Cameron.

Mr. Hollier stated that it is realistic for the State to fully fund the implementation of the comprehensive plan. Momentum is growing and the staff has identified critical watershed issues that must be addressed regardless of funding availability, including aquifer depletion. He stated that Louisiana has 11 aquifers, all of which are under stress and are being depleted faster than they can be naturally recharged. He emphasized that water availability is a critical issue and a major component of the comprehensive plan.

Staff is developing a cost-benefit analysis and proposal to demonstrate the economic viability of the proposed reservoirs, referred to by the Louisiana Watershed Initiative as retention lakes. He stated that these facilities are intended to capture excess freshwater. He expressed optimism that the strategy could become a valuable tool in advancing reservoir development.

The first proposed reservoir is Mill Creek in Allen Parish, followed by a Flat Creek northeast of DeRidder in Beauregard Parish. He noted the two reservoirs have very different characteristics and each reservoir will likely be unique. The overall objective of the region is organized into a prioritized framework referred to as the "Seven Spokes of the Wheel."

Mr. Hollier stated that once the Coalition Policy Council ratifies the proposed legislation, he will seek authorization from the Board, in its role as administrator, to proceed.

Mr. Jacob Dillehay stated that he has been involved with the watershed initiative since its early stages and served on both the Technical Advisory Committee and the Coalition Policy Committee. He stated that pursuing this action is a logical next step to keep the effort moving forward and expressed his belief that it is needed.

A MOTION to approve Resolution No. 2327 Approving and Authorizing Proposed Legislation to Establish the West Louisiana Public Coordination District for Louisiana Watershed Initiative Region 4 was made by Ms. Kim Monte and seconded by Ms. Lisa Adams. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

VII. Resolution No. 2328 Approving and Establishing the Southwest Louisiana Regional Land Bank. Mr. Mike Hollier
Action requested.

A MOTION to discuss Resolution No. 2328 Approving and Establishing the Southwest Louisiana Regional Land Bank was made by Mayor Hal McMillan and seconded by Ms. Mary Kaye Eason. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried, and the floor opened for discussion.

Mr. Mike Hollier reported that the Board had previously authorized staff to proceed in the creation of the Southwest Louisiana Regional Land Bank but noted that there are many variables and details that still need to be worked out. He stated that this is a new tool authorized by the State of Louisiana through recent legislation and described it as a powerful instrument.

Land banks are generally viewed as tools for housing, but he sees significant potential for their use in transportation development as well. He explained that the Metropolitan Planning Organization is required to maintain a 25-year comprehensive plan, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, and that one of the ongoing challenges is funding the improvements identified in that plan. He stated that he believes the land bank could play a major role in supporting transportation development across the region.

He stated that the RPC board should have a more in-depth discussion regarding the governance structure of the land bank, including the composition of a governing board and potential revenue sources to support its operations. He believes there are viable opportunities available.

Mr. Hollier requested that the Board defer action on the resolution at this time so that staff can engage in a more consultative process with the Board to address details thoroughly and ensure alignment with the Board's expectations. The intent is to fully vet the proposal before moving forward.

A MOTION to defer Resolution No. 2328 Approving and Establishing the Southwest Louisiana Regional Land Bank for thirty (30) days was made by Mayor Hal McMillan and seconded by Ms. Mary Kaye Eason. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

VIII. Resolution No. 2329 Identifying Potential Funding Alternatives for the Southwest Louisiana Regional Mobility Authority. Mr. Mike Hollier
Action requested.

A MOTION to discuss Resolution No. 2329 Identifying Potential Funding Alternatives for the Southwest Louisiana Regional Mobility Authority was made by Ms. Mary Kaye Eason and seconded by Ms. Kim Monte. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried, and the floor opened for discussion.

Mr. Mike Hollier stated that the Board has already approved the establishment of the Southwest Louisiana Regional Mobility Authority, noting that the qualification for moving forward is contingent upon the Board adopting the transportation improvements that the Authority would fund. He stated that this issue remains outstanding and needs to be addressed.

Mr. Hollier is requesting the Board defer action on the resolution at this time so that staff can engage in more in-depth consultation with Board members regarding the projects and financing options. He emphasized that while he strongly supports the creation of the Southwest Louisiana Regional Mobility Authority, it cannot function without a sustainable funding source. He stated that there are several potential financing options available, and that staff have already briefed citizen groups and individuals associated with the Board on some of these options.

One funding option discussed is legislative authority similar to what was granted to the City of Ruston and the City of Monroe when they created Transportation Improvement Districts. Mr. Hollier explained that this would involve dedicating 1¢ of the state sales tax within the Interstate Highway corridor in Southwest Louisiana. He stated that, if granted by the Legislature, this mechanism could generate approximately $13 million annually for the Southwest Louisiana Regional Mobility Authority. He noted that this is only one option among several. Another potential option involves the Regional Land Bank, which staff believes could help facilitate funding solutions.

He reiterated his request to meet with the Board to review all available financing options in detail, emphasizing that the discussion extends beyond Metropolitan Planning Organization funds.

Mr. Hollier recently met with Mr. Glenn Ledet, the new Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, and discussed multiple transportation needs and opportunities, including Interstate 514, rail infrastructure, Interstate 10 and Interstate 210 bridges, and other transportation corridors. Mr. Glenn Ledet asked the purpose of the Regional Mobility Authority and explained that many member governments face significant road and infrastructure challenges.

Mr. Hollier stated that one of the first projects he encountered issues with was Enterprise Boulevard in the City of Lake Charles. He stated that the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) originally allocated $1.1 million for an overlay project, but subsequent evaluation revealed the need for complete reconstruction, increasing the cost to approximately $9 million. Further investigation revealed that underground utilities were 70 to 80 years old, including water lines, sewer lines, and drainage systems, all of which required replacement prior to roadway reconstruction. He stated that as a result, the project cost escalated toward $20 million. He emphasized that roadway projects cannot be addressed in isolation without considering the condition of underlying utility infrastructure.

The MPO operates within a four-year improvement window, he explained, and if allocated funds are not spent, they are redistributed by DOTD. He stated that this situation has occurred frequently.

Mr. Hollier conveyed to Mr. Ledet that the issue is not limited to road surfacing but involves aging infrastructure beneath the roads. He referenced similar challenges faced by other communities in the region, including Sulphur, DeRidder, DeQuincy, Jennings, Oakdale, and the City of Lake Charles. Many communities are dealing with utility systems that are decades old, noting examples where drainage systems constructed of cypress materials were discovered during road work.

Mr. Hollier stated that while he is not expecting DOTD to fund water, sewer, or drainage improvements, he believes one of the primary purposes of the Regional Mobility Authority should be to address these underlying infrastructure issues directly. He said doing so would prevent wasting funds on surface improvements when the base infrastructure is failing. He stated that scope increases are often the result of uncovering these conditions. Enterprise Boulevard is not an isolated case.

Mr. Mike Hollier concluded by reiterating his request that the Board defer action on the resolution so that discussions can continue with the Board to fully explore priorities and funding mechanisms related to the Regional Mobility Authority.

Mayor Neal Watkins said that he would like to see if it is possible for Mr. Hollier to initiate an email thread to begin discussions on the funding mechanisms. He stated that this would allow Board members to have some preliminary understanding of the potential options prior to meeting again. Mr. Hollier agreed to do so.

Mayor Hal McMillin stated that, in addition to funding, the mapping of underground infrastructure beneath roadways has not been adequately completed. He stated that during projects such as those on Garfield Street, drainage is sometimes installed directly over water lines, and fiber optic lines are later introduced, creating conflicts. He stated that the lack of coordination results in significant issues. He emphasized the need for better preplanning and suggested that having opportunities to review industry practices and infrastructure mapping would be beneficial. He further stated that when roadways are excavated, the underground information should be captured and documented for future use.

Mr. Hollier fully agreed. He referenced Ryan Street as an example, noting that it is a state highway that has been repeatedly torn up, patched, and reopened over the past two years for different purposes. He stated that this example illustrates the broader issue he is trying to convey. He emphasized that the Regional Mobility Authority should not focus solely on resurfacing roads or constructing new roads or bridges but should also address the underlying infrastructure that those transportation facilities are built upon.

A MOTION to defer Resolution No. 2329 Identifying Potential Funding Alternatives for the Southwest Louisiana Regional Mobility Authority for thirty (30) days was made by Mayor Mike Danahay and seconded by Ms. Lisa Adams. Hearing no objections, the MOTION carried.

IX. MyGovOnline/MGO Connect — Mr. Mike Hollier

Discussion

Mr. Mike Hollier stated that South Central Planning and Development Commission in Houma has been very aggressive over the past 20 years in addressing the needs of local government. He stated that the director, Mr. Kevin Belanger, has pursued the development of what was originally called MyGovOnline for more than 15 years and is now rebranded as MGO Connect. He explained that the platform was initially focused on building inspections and permitting, which still comprise the majority of its functionality.

Mr. Hollier stated that he attended the latest of three MGO Connect conferences. He stated that Mr. Kevin Belanger encouraged him to attend and that he was extremely impressed by how advanced the system has become. He stated that MGO Connect is now operating in 28 states and serving approximately 13,000 jurisdictions, supported by a team dedicated to onboarding and system support. He stated that while the system is primarily focused on permitting and inspections, it is beginning to expand into public works and other aspects of community development.

Mr. Hollier stated that he was particularly pleased that Mayor Henry Guinn was able to attend the conference, noting that the platform addressed several challenges facing the City of Jennings. He stated that the conference attendance far exceeded expectations, with approximately 350 participants attending instead of the anticipated 80, indicating strong engagement and interest.

Mr. Hollier stated that, in his opinion, every parish and municipality in Southwest Louisiana should consider joining MGO Connect. He stated that jurisdictions can participate with no upfront cost and explained that the system operates as a self-sustaining enterprise fund, taking a small portion of each permit transaction rather than charging initial fees. He compared the model to a franchise structure where revenue is generated only after operations are underway.

He explained that jurisdictions from across the country, including California, Florida, West Virginia, as well as Baton Rouge, and potentially New Orleans and Dallas, are engaged with MGO Connect. He emphasized that the organization is not a temporary or informal operation. The platform offers benefits aligned with several objectives and needs previously identified by the Board.

Mr. Hollier stated that he was impressed by the technical expertise of individuals involved with MGO Connect, including Mr. Ryan Hutchinson, a key leader within MGO Connect.

Mr. Hollier plans to continue discussions with Mr. Belanger and Mr. Hutchinson and requested that the Board consider allowing MGO Connect to make a presentation at a future meeting.

X. January Meeting Date and Time Chair

For information only. No action is required.

Mr. Jacob Dillehay noted that the agenda listed the Chair for the January meeting date and time but stated that he would defer to Ms. Jamie Gaines.

Ms. Gaines proposed Wednesday, February 4th as the next meeting date, and would send out a placeholder calendar.

XI. Public Comment Chair

Mayor Hal McMillin congratulated the Iowa Yellow Jackets on their first-ever LHSAA football state championship on December 12, 2025. Mayor McMillin congratulated Mayor Neal Watkins of Iowa. This was the first state championship in Calcasieu Parish since 1972.

XII. Adjournment Chair

A MOTION to ADJOURN was made by Mayor Hal McMillan and seconded by Mayor Mike Danahay. Hearing no objections, the meeting ADJOURNED.

Jacob Dillehay

Jacob Dillehay, Chair

ATTEST: Michael Hollier

Michael Hollier, AICP, Director